

Chapter 4. Perceptions of Transportation in Michigan

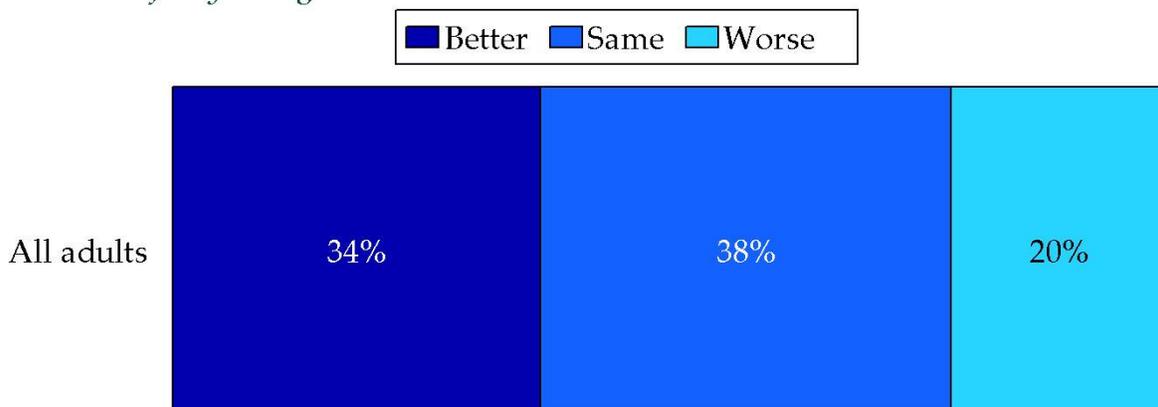
We also asked a series of questions whose purpose was less to evaluate MDOT directly and more to measure the public's general perception of the present state of transportation in Michigan and the way it is funded. Most of these questions came in the form of statements for which respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed. Sections 4.1 through 4.3 address the results of these questions.

4.1 Quality of Transportation in the Past Five Years

To get a sense of whether the public thinks transportation quality is changing, we asked respondents whether the quality of transportation in Michigan is better, the same, or worse than it was five years ago. Considerably more Michigan adults think transportation quality is better than think it is worse (34% versus 20%), although the plurality (38%) sees no change (Figure 9).

Figure 9. More Michigan Adults Believe the Quality of Transportation Is Better Than Believe It Is Worse Than It Was Five Years Ago (Question 3)

Q3. Is the quality of transportation in Michigan better, the same, or worse than it was five years ago?

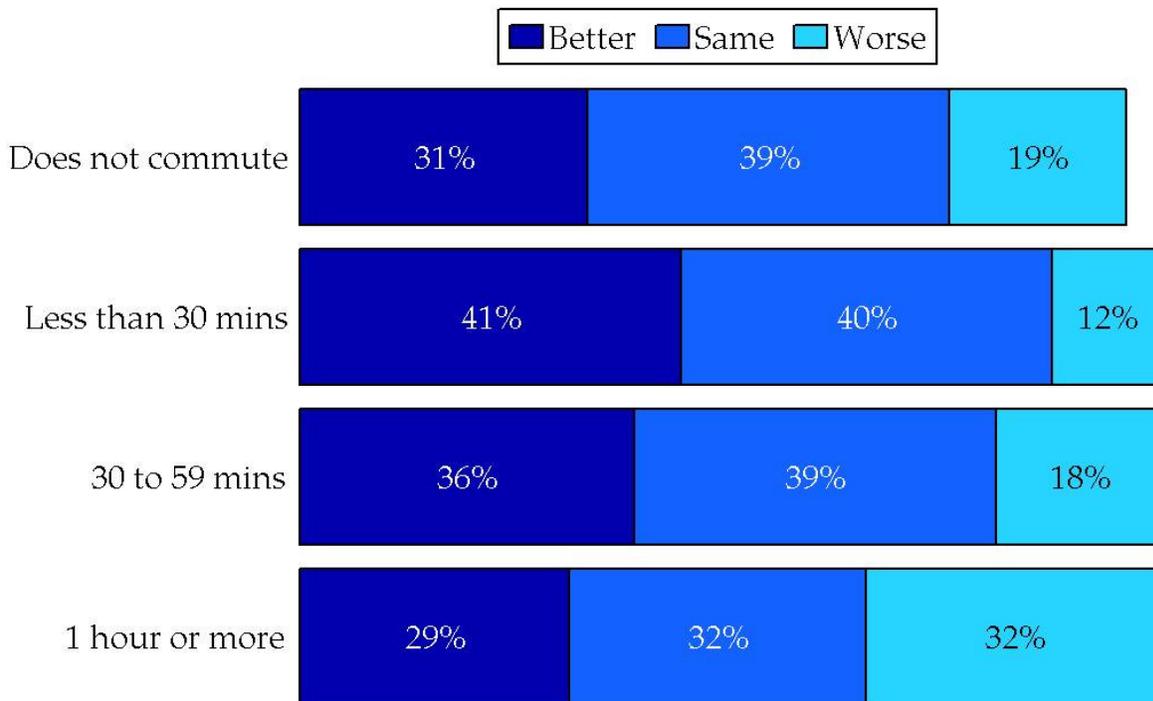


Remainder: "Not sure"

We see demographic patterns on this question similar to the evaluative questions. Michigan adults with household incomes over \$75,000 are more likely to say things have gotten worse in the past five years (27%), as are non-Whites (25%). Younger women (under 45 years of age) are more likely to believe transportation quality has become better (40%). Michigan adults under 30 years of age are much less likely to be able to voice an opinion on this question (18%), but of those who do, twice as many believe transportation quality has improved (32%). We do not see as strong a pattern with population density with this measure.

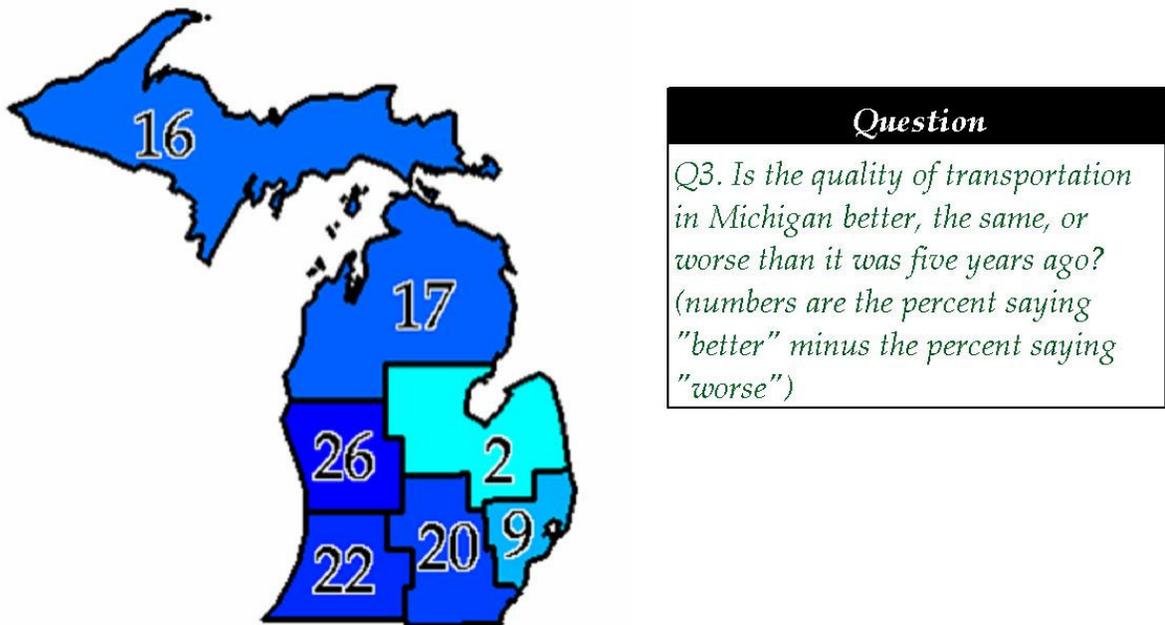
Commuters who drive an hour or more to work are much more likely (32%) to say transportation quality is worse than it was five years ago, while those who commute less than 30 minutes are the least likely to say that (12%) and are much more likely to say things are better (41%—Figure 10).

Figure 10. Michigan Adults with the Longest Commutes Are Most Likely to Say Transportation Has Gotten Worse in Past Five Years (Question 3)



In **Figure 11**, we present these results regionally, by subtracting the percentage who say transportation quality is worse than it was five years ago from the percentage who say it is better. The region most positive about the direction that transportation quality has been headed is Grand, where 42% of respondents say it is better and 16% say it worse. The least positive region is the Bay Region, where 24% say transportation quality is better and 22% say it is worse. Bay is followed by the Metro Region, where a considerably higher percentage (32%) say transportation quality is better, but where the percentage of those who say it is worse (23%) is the highest of all regions.

Figure 11. Bay Residents Are Least Likely to Believe Transportation Is Better Rather Than Worse Than Five Years Ago; Grand Residents Most Likely to Believe It (Question 3)

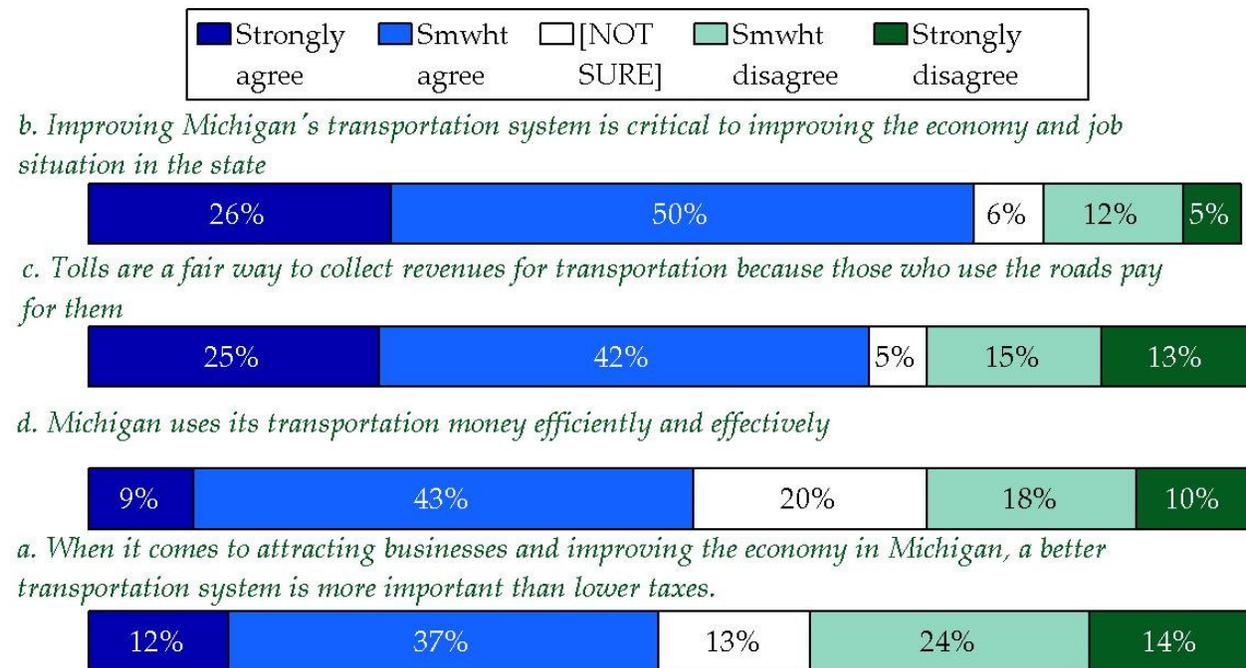


4.2 Transportation Funding

We asked four agree/disagree questions that address arguments about approaches to spending and raising revenue for transportation. **Figure 12** has the statewide results for each of the five questions.

The statement that Michigan adults were most likely to agree with is *Improving Michigan's transportation system is critical to improving the economy and job situation in the state*. Three-quarters (76%) of Michigan adults agree with this statement (26% strongly), while only 17% disagree (five percent strongly).

Figure 12. People Agree Most That Improving Transportation Is Critical for Improving the Economy; But Agree Least That It Is More Important for Economy Than Lowering Taxes (Question 6)

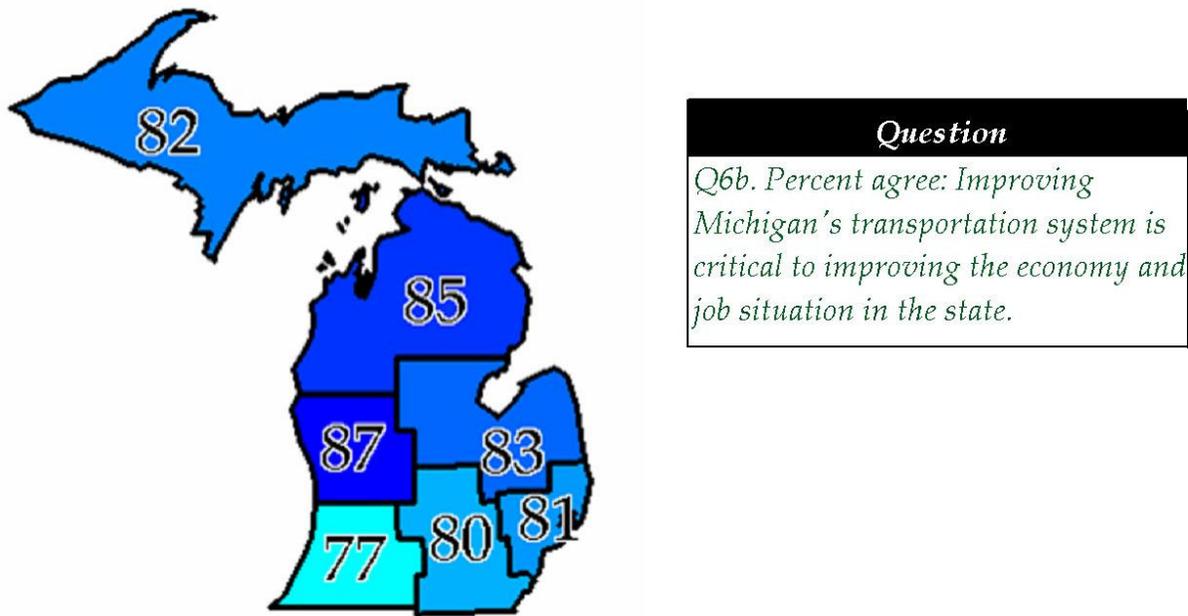


Regionally, the variation on this question is not tremendous, with residents of Grand most likely to agree and those in Southwest least likely to agree (**Figure 13**). Michigan adults with household incomes \$75,000 or greater are the most likely to agree with this statement (85%), while residents with incomes under \$30,000 are the less likely to agree (67%). This income gap is especially pronounced among men.

However, the public is much more divided on this issue when it involves raising taxes. One-half (49%) of Michigan adults agree and 38% disagree that *when it comes to attracting businesses and improving the economy in Michigan, a better transportation system is more important than lower taxes* (See **Figure 12** above). Of the four statements, this one had the least agreement among the public—although more agreed than disagreed. Thus, if higher taxes are a stipulation for an improved transportation system, more believe it will improve the economy than hurt it. However, the high level agreement we saw in the previous question dissipates a good deal.

The regional pattern is similar to the pattern for the first statement, although Grand does not differ tremendously from the rest of the state, and the Southwest Region is much less likely to agree (**Figure 14**). There is a ten percent gap between the higher income residents and the

Figure 13. Grand Residents Most Likely To Agree That Improving Transportation System Is Critical To Economic Improvement; SW Residents Least Likely To Agree (Question 6b)



“Not sure” is excluded from this analysis.

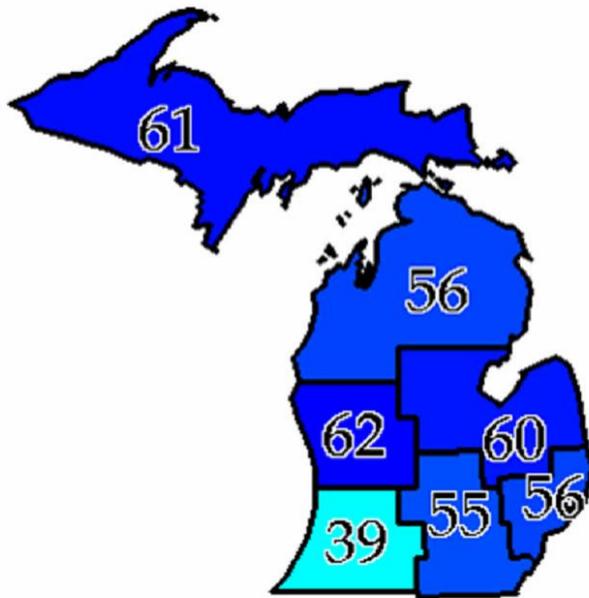
lowest, which is significant but less pronounced. Michigan seniors (65 years of age or older) are considerably less likely (39%) to agree with the statement. Non-Whites (56%) are more likely to agree with it than are Whites (47%).

The statement with the second highest level of agreement is: *Tolls are a fair way to collect revenues for transportation because those who use the roads pay for them.* Two-thirds (67%) of Michigan adults agree with this statement, while 28% disagree (See **Figure 12** above).

Regionally, agreement with this statement is the highest in the Superior, Grand, and Bay regions and lowest in the University Region (**Figure 15**). Despite large regional variation, we do not see much else in the way of demographic differences. Seniors (71%), especially senior men (74%), are more likely to agree with the statement. Non-Whites are less likely to agree (60%) than are Whites (68%). Commuters who commute 45 minutes or more to work are also less likely to agree (57%).

The last statement was *Michigan uses its transportation money efficiently and effectively.* Slightly over one-half (52%) of Michigan adults agree with this statement, while slightly more than one-quarter (28%) disagree (See **Figure 12** above).

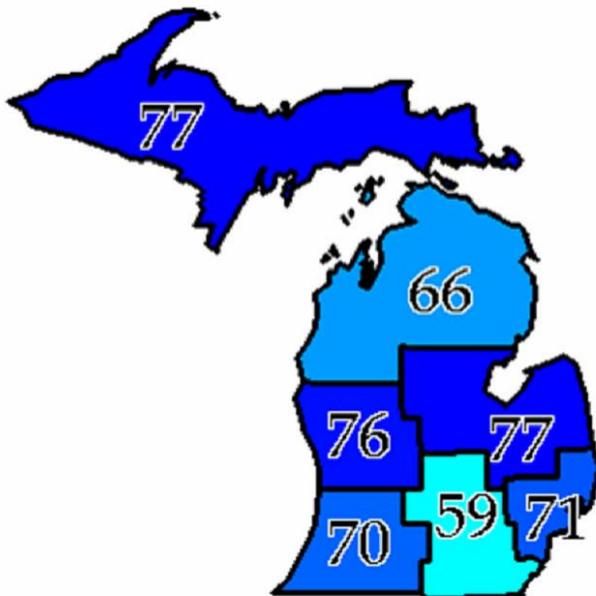
Figure 14. Southwest Residents Are Much Less Likely to Agree That a Better Transportation System Is More Important For the Economy Than Lower Taxes (Question 6a)



Question
Q6a. Percent agree: When it comes to attracting businesses and improving the economy in Michigan, a better transportation system is more important than lower taxes.

“Not sure” is excluded from this analysis.

Figure 15. Superior, Bay & Grand Residents Most Likely To Agree That Tolls Are a Fair Way to Collect Revenues; University Residents Least Likely to Agree (Question 6c)

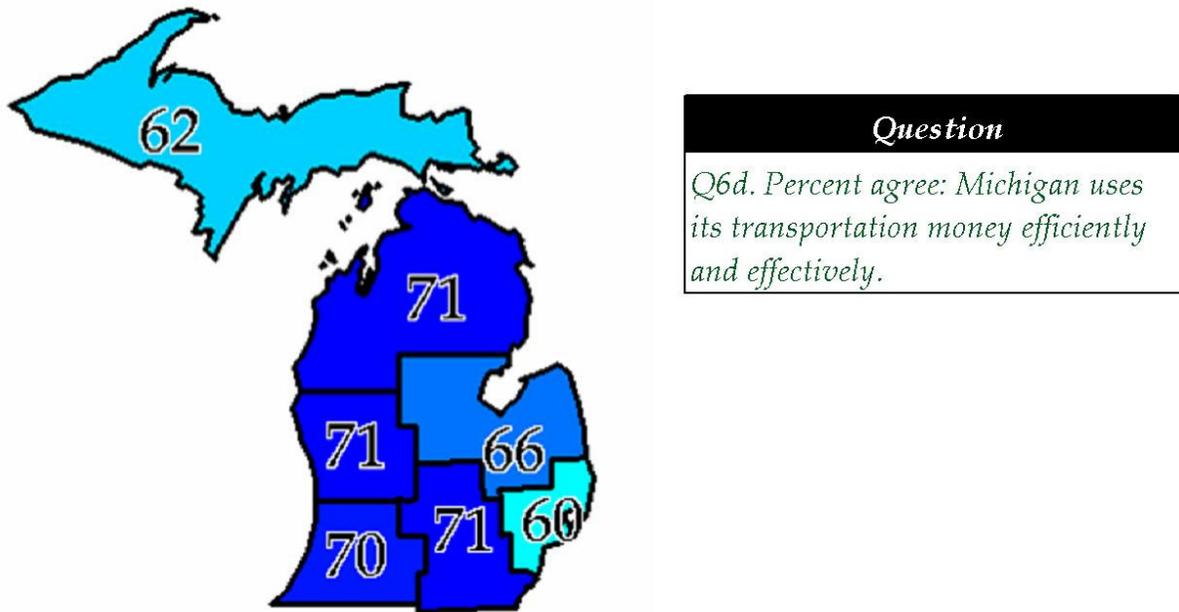


Question
Q6c. Percent agree: Tolls are a fair way to collect revenues for transportation because those who use the roads pay for them.

“Not sure” is excluded from this analysis.

Regionally, residents in the divergent regions of Metro and Superior are less likely to agree with this idea (**Figure 16**). There is very little demographic variation on this question. Young and old and rich and poor residents are less likely to state an opinion about this statement than are the middle-aged and the middle class. Non-Whites are a little less likely to agree (46%) than are Whites (54%).

Figure 16. Metro & Superior Residents Least Likely To Agree That Michigan Is Using Its Transportation Money Efficiently & Effectively (Question 6d)



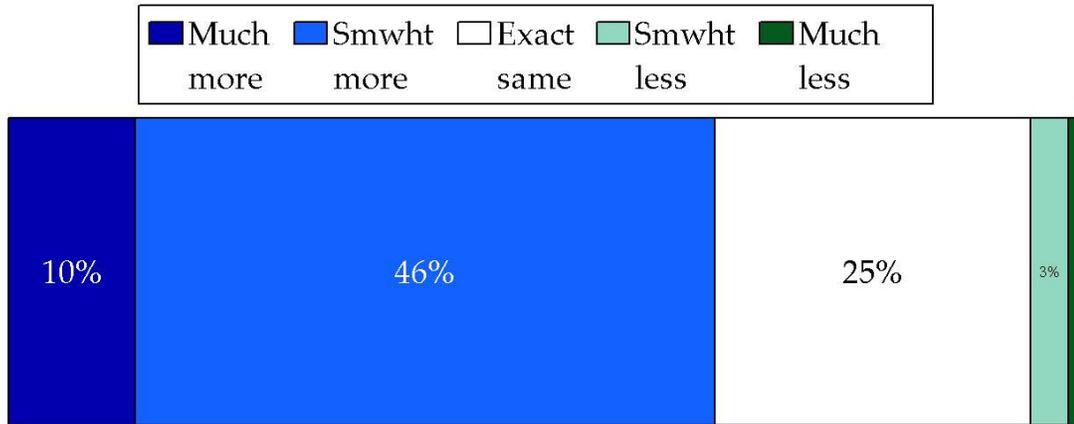
“Not sure” is excluded from this analysis.

In a question that was not a part of the agree/disagree battery, respondents were asked: *How much more do you think that Michigan should spend to maintain and improve the quality of transportation systems in the state?* Over one-half (56%) said more (ten percent much more) and only four percent said Michigan should spend less (**Figure 17**).

Regionally, variation on the question is not tremendous, with the percentage saying more should be spent to improve the quality of transportation being the lowest in North and University and the highest in the Bay Region (**Figure 18**). Interestingly, support for greater transportation spending is greater among higher income Michigan adults than lower income adults (**Figure 19**). Commuters are more supportive of higher spending for improved transportation than are non-commuters. Seniors (48%), especially senior women (42), are much less likely to believe there should be more spending. Michigan residents in high population density areas (more than 3000 people per square mile) are more likely to support more spending to improve transportation quality (66%).

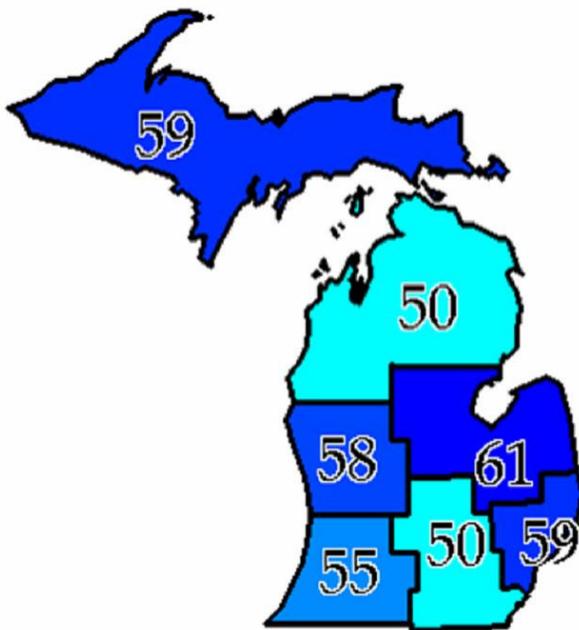
Figure 17. A Majority Think Michigan Should Spend More To Maintain and Improve the Quality of Transportation (Question 8)

Q8. How much more do you think that Michigan should spend to maintain and improve the quality of transportation systems in the state?



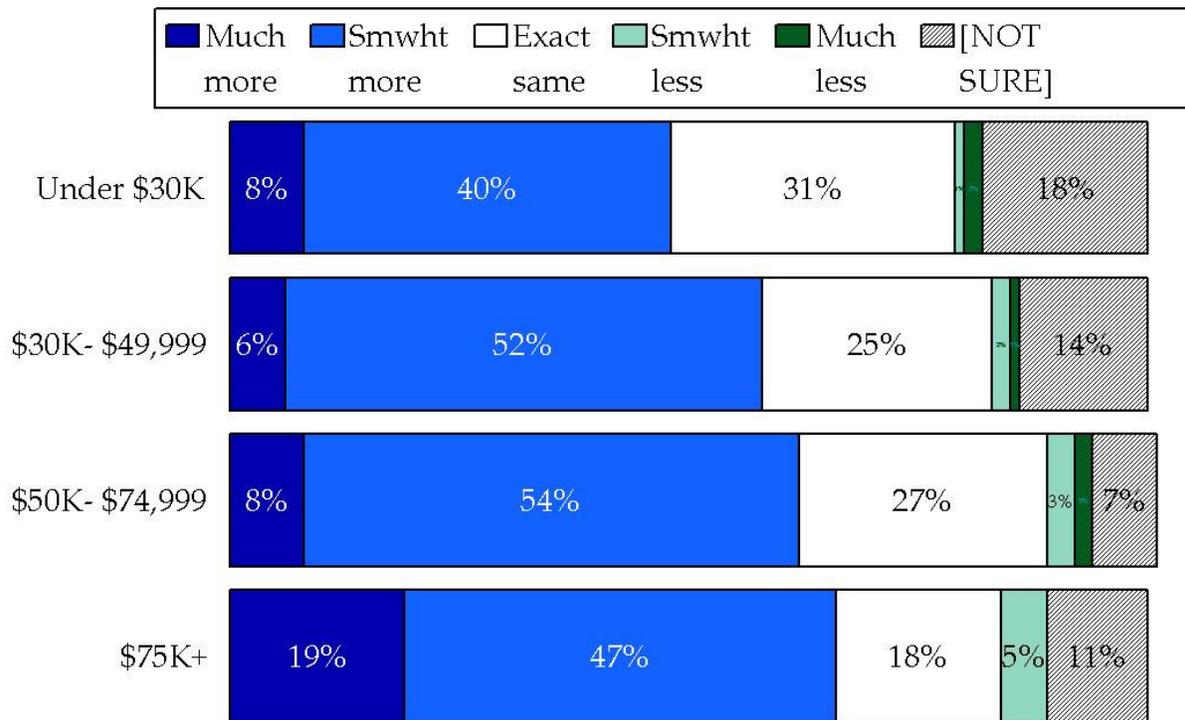
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Figure 18. Support for Spending More on Transportation Is Lowest in the University & North Regions (Question 8)



Question
Q8. Percent saying "more": How much more do you think that Michigan should spend to maintain and improve the quality of transportation systems in the state?

Figure 19. The Higher the Respondent's Household Income, the More They Support More Transportation Spending (Question 8)



Remainder: "Not sure"

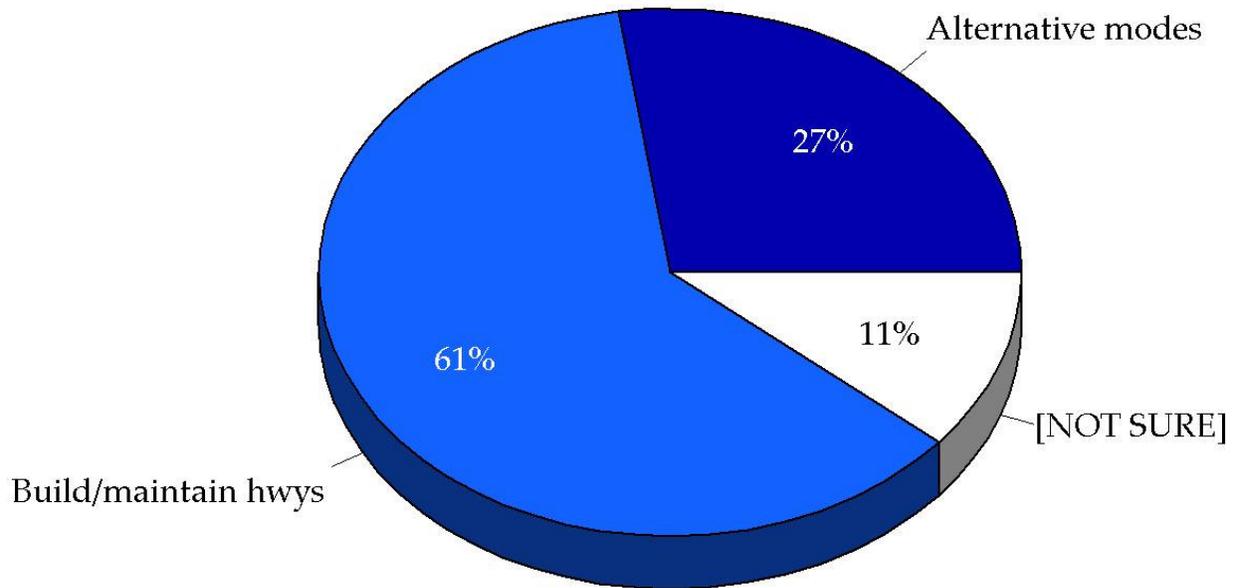
4.3 Choices: Directions for Transportation in Michigan

We asked one question that poses two competing choices about the direction Michigan should take in building and maintaining its highways:

Q7. Would you prefer to see Michigan give more emphasis to building and maintaining highways or to developing alternative modes of transportation such as buses, vans for senior citizens, light-rail, or bike lanes?

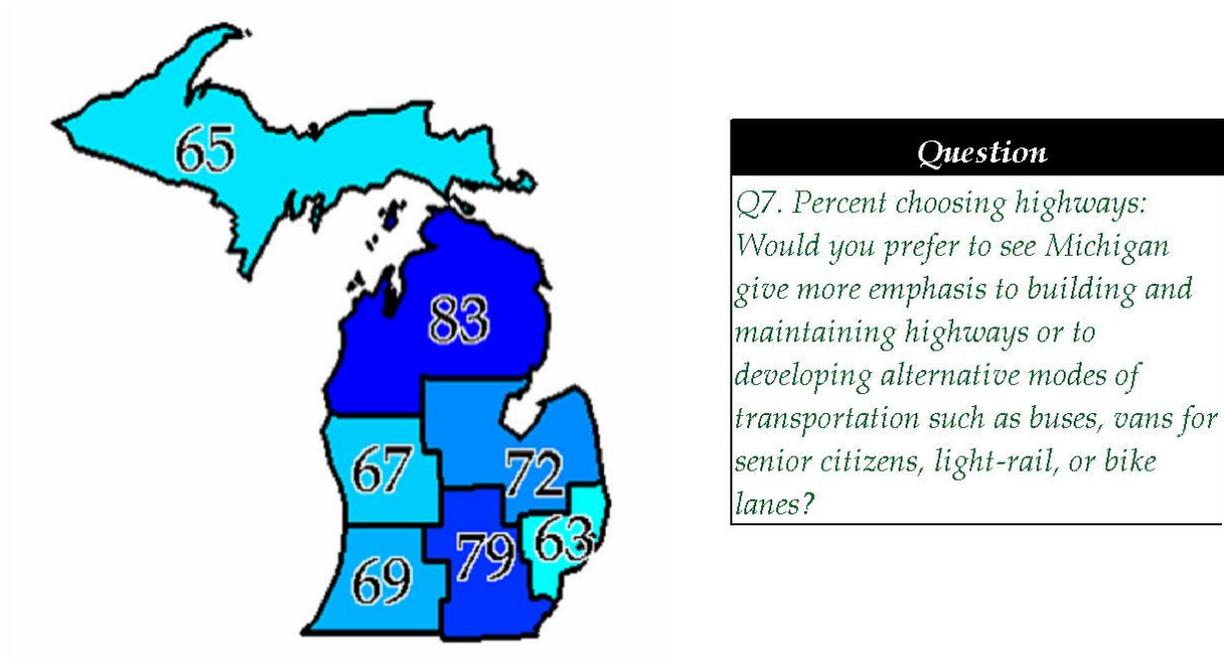
Overwhelmingly, Michigan adults prefer that the state emphasize building and maintaining highways over alternative modes of transportation (Figure 20). The public’s agenda appears to be focused on state highways and roads and not on transportation alternatives. This is not to say that the public opposes these alternatives or that MDOT should lower their profile in its future transportation agenda. However, if MDOT does give greater emphasis to alternative modes at the expense of emphasizing highways and roads, it is important that it actively educate the public about why such alternatives are necessary. Furthermore, if such a campaign were pursued, we recommend that MDOT engage in further research to find out how to best deliver its message on this issue.

Figure 20. By a Ratio Greater than 2-to-1, Michigan Adults Prefer Building & Maintaining Existing Hwys Over Developing Alternative Modes Of Transportation (Question 7)



Regionally, support for more emphasis on building and maintaining highways over alternative modes of transportation is greatest in the North and, to a slightly lesser degree, the University Region (**Figure 21**). Support is the least in the divergent regions of Metro and Superior although even in these regions, there are more than six people who support more emphasis on highways for every four who support alternative modes. Michigan adults with lower incomes are much less likely to support an emphasis on highways over alternative modes (**Figure 22**), as are non-Whites, who are completely divided in their support for more emphasis on highways (48%) or more emphasis on alternative modes of transportation (46%). There is also a strong variation based on the population density of one's surrounding area, with those in low density areas much more supportive of an emphasis on highways and those in high density areas much more supportive of an emphasis on alternative modes (**Figure 23**).

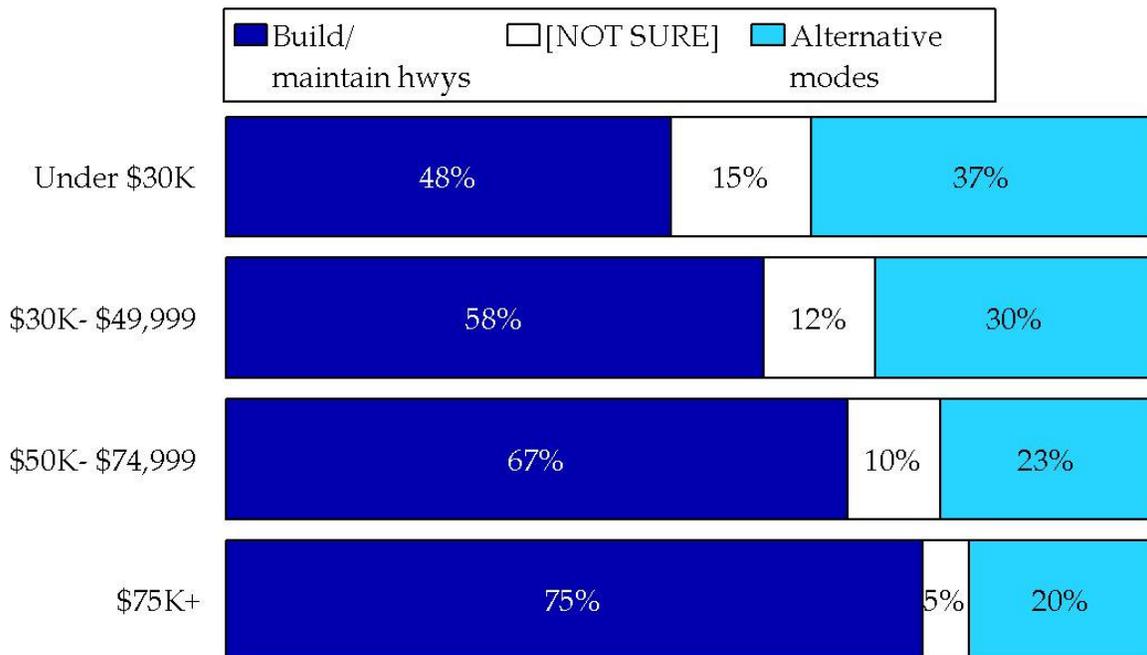
Figure 21. All Regions Strongly Support an Emphasis on Highways to Alternative Modes; Alternative Modes Has Greatest Support in Superior & Metro Regions (Question 7)



Question
 Q7. Percent choosing highways:
 Would you prefer to see Michigan give more emphasis to building and maintaining highways or to developing alternative modes of transportation such as buses, vans for senior citizens, light-rail, or bike lanes?

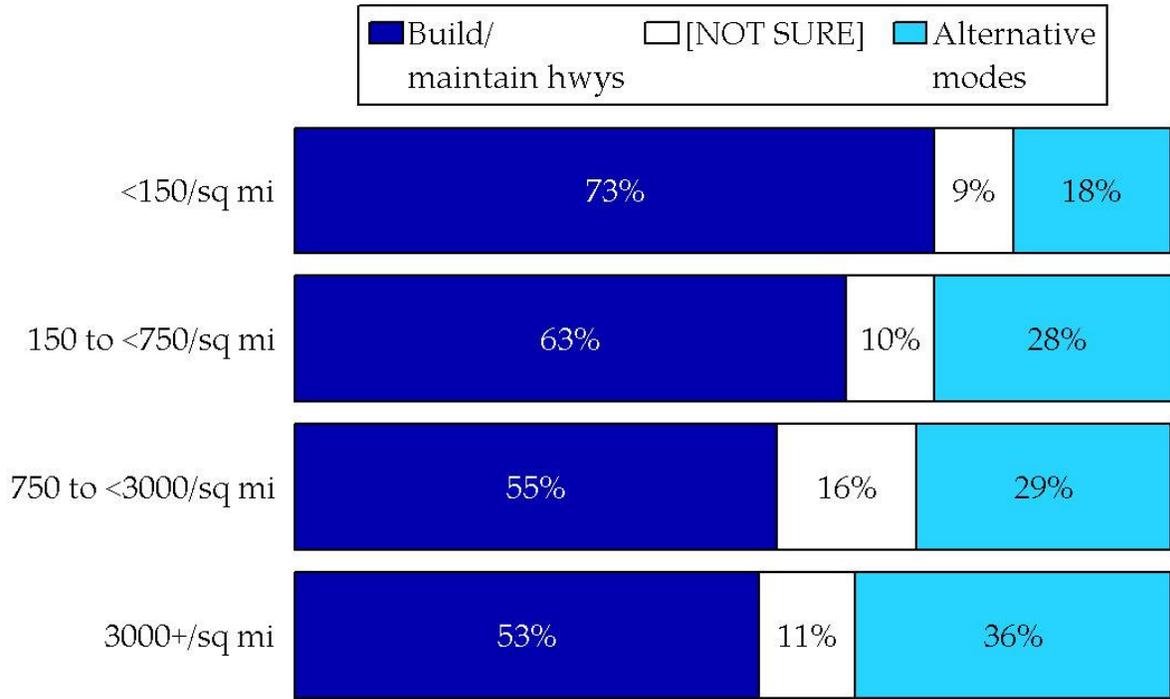
“Not sure” is excluded from this analysis.

Figure 22. The Higher the Respondent's Household Income, the More They Support More an Emphasis on Highways over Alternative Modes of Transportation (Question 7)



Remainder: "Not sure"

Figure 23. The Greater Their Area's Population Density, the More Support a Respondent Has for an Emphasis on Alternative Modes of Transportation over Highways (Question 7)



Remainder: "Not sure"